

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs (“the Commission”) was established on 26 March 1992 under the aegis of the Presidents of the United States and Russia. Ambassador Malcolm Toon was appointed by President George Bush, and re-confirmed by President William J. Clinton, to serve as the American Co-chairman. General-Colonel Dmitrii Volkogonov was appointed by President Boris Yeltsin and served as the Russian Co-chairman until his death on 6 December 1995. In January 1996 General-Major Vladimir Zolotarev was appointed by President Yeltsin to succeed General Volkogonov.

The nine commissioners who comprise the U.S. side of the Commission include two members of the United States Senate: John Kerry (D-Massachusetts) and Robert Smith (R-New Hampshire); two members of the U.S. House of Representatives: Sam Johnson (R-Texas) and Pete Peterson (D-Florida); two senior executives from the Department of Defense: A. Denis Clift (President, Joint Military Intelligence College) and James Wold (Deputy Assistant Secretary for POW/MIA Affairs); two senior executives from the Department of State: Kent Wiedemann (Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs) and John Herbst (Principal Deputy Coordinator, Russia and the Caucasus), and a senior executive from the U.S. National Archives: Michael McReynolds. The executive secretary of the U.S. side of the Commission is Norman Kass of the Defense POW/MIA Office. The Russian side of the Commission includes officials from the Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs, the Russian State Archives, the Federal Security Service, the Foreign Intelligence Service, and the Russian Presidential Commission on POWs, Internees and Missing in Action. Colonel Sergei Osipov of the President’s Office serves as the executive secretary of the Russian side of the Commission. In addition, the Commission has benefited from the service of numerous archivists, military historians, analysts, linguists and professional military personnel from both the American and Russian sides.

The Commission's inaugural meeting was held in Moscow in March 1992. In the ensuing four years the Commission has met in plenary session an additional eleven times - nine in Moscow and two in Washington. In addition to the plenary sessions, two other high-level meetings between U.S. and Russian commissioners have been held in Washington. Between plenary sessions, working-group-level technical talks have supported the work of the Commission. Commission members have traveled throughout Russia, as well as to the newly independent states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan and to Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In each country the Commission has sought assistance in obtaining information about U.S. POW/MIAs. Meetings with high-ranking government officials have been conducted, and appeals to local citizens for information have been issued through the print and broadcast media.

During meetings of the Commission in the United States, POW/MIA family members have been afforded a unique opportunity to present their concerns and questions directly to General Volkogonov and other Russian members of the Commission. In conjunction with two technical-level meetings held in Washington, Russian members of the Commission have visited the Defense POW/MIA Office, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory, the National Archives and Aberdeen Proving Grounds. Russian members of the Commission and Russian forensic specialists have also visited the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii, where they were briefed by U.S. specialists on the most up-to-date scientific techniques and methods for identifying human remains.

The work of the U.S. side of the Commission was initially supported by Task Force Russia, an organization created by the Secretary of the Army at the request of the Secretary of Defense and responsible for research, analysis and investigation into issues identified by the Commission. In July 1993, the mission, functions and many of the personnel of Task Force Russia were incorporated into the Office of the Secretary of Defense in the newly created Defense POW/MIA Office. The Commission continues to receive research, analytical and

investigative support from the Joint Commission Support Directorate of the Defense POW/MIA Office.

Information of value to the work of the Commission is gained primarily through access to archival records and through interviews of veterans, government officials and other knowledgeable Russian and American citizens. Archival research and interviews are conducted in the former Soviet Union and in the United States.

The Commission has received more than 12,000 pages of Russian documents, many of which were once highly classified. Initially the documents are screened by U.S. analysts to determine their pertinence and significance to the work of the Commission. Those determined to be pertinent are translated into English for further analysis. To date, more than 4,000 pages have been translated into English and analyzed in detail. Copies of the original documents, screening reports and translations are forwarded to the Library of Congress and to the National Archives. Documents directly related to the fate of specific unaccounted-for American servicemen are also forwarded through the appropriate service casualty office to family members.

Through the research efforts of the Russian side, the Commission has gained access to important archival information. At this stage in its work the Commission believes that more archival information remains. Archival searches continue in both countries. The Russian side is currently considering requests by the U.S. side for specific documents and for additional Russian archival searches of Presidential, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Foreign Intelligence, Security Service and Border Guards archives.

Hundreds of interviews with Russian and American veterans, current and former government officials and other individuals have been conducted to further the work of the Commission. Initially, interviews in Russia were conducted jointly by Russian and American staff members. As the scope of the interview program expanded, the U.S. side was granted permission to travel throughout Russia to conduct interviews. In the newly independent states of

the former Soviet Union, interviews have been conducted with the consent and support of the host governments. To date, important witnesses to and participants in the Korean War, the Cold War and the Vietnam War have been interviewed. Information gained in the interviews is analyzed and collated with information from archival sources and from other interviews to form the basis for broad-based analysis and to suggest leads for further investigation.

In pursuit of information on unaccounted-for Americans, the U.S. side's representatives in Moscow have visited psychiatric hospitals, prisons and prison camps. Card files and other relevant hospital and prison records have been reviewed for evidence of unaccounted-for Americans. The Commission continues its efforts to identify and visit psychiatric hospitals and prison facilities.

To facilitate its work, the Commission established permanent working groups on World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War and the war in Vietnam. The work of the Commission and its four working groups was summarized in an interim report signed on 25 May 1995 by Ambassador Toon and General Volkogonov. The report, prepared jointly in English and Russian, was presented to President Clinton and President Yeltsin. Since that time the Commission has continued its work. The 12th Plenary session was held in Moscow from 28-30 August 1995. Following the death of the Commission's Russian Co-chairman, General Volkogonov, the plenary session scheduled for December 1995 was postponed. In February 1996 technical-level talks, at which the new Russian Co-chairman was introduced, were held in Moscow. Throughout this transitional period research, analysis and investigation have continued in Russia and the United States.

In its work the Commission has focused on three primary objectives. The first objective has been to determine whether any American POW/MIAs are still being held in the former Soviet Union against their will. In his testimony to the U.S. Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs on 11 November 1992, General Volkogonov presented a statement from Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin which stated, in part: "As a result of the work done,

one may conclude that today there are no American citizens held against their will on the territory of Russia.” In a written statement to the Committee, General Volkogonov further said that:

“No U.S. citizens are currently being detained within the territory of the former USSR. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of all archival documents, interviews with witnesses, and on-site inspections of possible American housing sites.”

Representatives of the Russian Federation’s Federal Security Service and of the Ministry of Internal Affairs have provided similar statements. The archival research and interviews conducted by the Commission to date have produced no information which disputes General Volkogonov’s statement. The Commission has investigated numerous reports of live Americans in the former Soviet Union and will continue to pursue any new information which arises concerning possible live American POWs or MIAs.

The second objective of the Commission has been to determine the fate of unaccounted-for members of the U.S. Armed Forces who were located on the territory of the Soviet Union or about whom the Russian government may have information. The Commission records uneven progress towards this objective as discussed below by each working group. One of the Commission’s most significant accomplishments in this regard has been the repatriation of the remains of U.S. Air Force Captain John Dunham, lost in a shoot-down incident in the Soviet Far East in 1952.

The Commission’s third objective has been to clarify facts pertaining to Soviet personnel missing from the war in Afghanistan and from Cold War-era loss incidents. Issues related to this objective have been included in the work of the Cold War Working Group and are summarized below in that working group’s summary. The work of the Commission has also included resolving the fates of missing Soviet military personnel and “displaced persons” from World War II. Highlights from the Commission’s work towards this objective are set forth under the World War II Working Group section below.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

WORLD WAR II WORKING GROUP

The World War II Working Group (WWII WG) has conducted extensive research into the measures undertaken by both the Soviets and Americans in 1944 and 1945 to plan for, document and account for prisoners of war liberated by each side. The efforts of the working group have been based almost entirely on historical records which have been found in Russian and American archives. Thousands of pages of documents have been exchanged by the two sides of the working group.

The principal focus of the U.S. side of the working group has been to research and analyze the wartime experience of American prisoners of war liberated from German POW camps by the Soviet Red Army. In its comprehensive report, the U.S. side of the WWII WG provides a detailed analysis of the historical record regarding the numbers of U.S. POWs freed from the German camps in the Soviet zone of occupied Germany.

Research completed thus far by the WWII WG confirms that over 28,000 U.S. prisoners of war were repatriated under extremely chaotic and stressful circumstances from Soviet occupied territory during the final months of World War II. Information collected to date by the working group indicates that American servicemen were not held against their will as a matter of Soviet policy. However, as General Volkogonov noted on several occasions, at the end of World War II the repatriation of some American servicemen with Slavic, Baltic or Jewish names was delayed because of their ethnic origin. The U.S. side has received no documentary information to support General Volkogonov's statements.

The prime issue of concern to the Russian side of the working group has been to account more fully for more than 450,000 Soviet citizens who were located in displaced persons camps in the American and British zones of occupation at the end of World War II. The U.S.

side provided more than 5,500 pages of archival documents which shed light on the fates of more than 300,000 former Soviet POWs and displaced persons. The Commission's efforts to clarify the "displaced persons" question were lauded at celebrations in Moscow commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe.

There are a number of ongoing issues of concern to the U.S. side of the WWII WG and the Commission. They deal primarily with details on the fates of individual American servicemen. Requests for additional information from the Russian side have been made. Research to clarify details related to the fates of these servicemen continues in U.S. archives.

KOREAN WAR WORKING GROUP

The Korean War Working Group (KWWG) has engaged in a concerted effort to clarify the fates of American servicemen missing from the Korean War. In the course of their work, Russian and American researchers have interviewed more than one hundred people and have obtained several hundred pages of documentation from Russian and American archives. In addition, investigators have visited numerous camps, prisons and psychiatric hospitals in the former Soviet Union in pursuit of investigative leads.

Based on a thorough and ongoing comparison of U.S. and Soviet records, the KWWG has developed specific information on the circumstances surrounding the loss of 23 American servicemen. In these 23 cases the American servicemen are listed as missing in action. Based on the work of the KWWG, a significant amount of information now exists that indicates that these men perished. The KWWG has also developed information on the fates of another 54 missing-in-action servicemen. The working group believes that continued and coordinated inquiries into the holdings of the Russian Ministry of Defense archives will yield further clarification regarding the fate of individual American POW/MIAs.

The primary focus of the work of the KWWG has been its efforts to determine the facts concerning Soviet involvement with and the transfer of U.S. POWs from the Korean Theater of Operations to the Soviet Union. In the Interim Report of May 1995, the KWWG stated,

“The Commission has received information concerning statements of former Soviet officers asserting that there were cases of transferring American POWs to places of confinement on the territory of the former Soviet Union as well as cases of interrogation of American POWs who were transferred to Soviet territory for this purpose.”

In the last year the Commission has heard additional statements from former Soviet servicemen and others who assert that American servicemen were transferred to the Soviet Union. The KWWG attaches great importance to continued efforts to research the issue of the transfer of American POWs to the Soviet Union. It will continue to interview Russian, formerly Soviet, and American veterans and other citizens in pursuit of the facts surrounding this issue.

Central to the continued efforts of the KWWG is further access to Russian archives, particularly those of the Russian Ministry of Defense. At technical talks held in February 1996 in Moscow, the Russian side pledged to provide a large number of potentially relevant documents to the U.S. side. The U.S. side continues to wait for these documents.

COLD WAR WORKING GROUP

The work of the Cold War Working Group (CWWG) has focused on ten specific incidents of U.S. aircraft lost from 1950-1965. These incidents were selected in light of the fact that they occurred on or near the territory of the former Soviet Union and resulted in missing American servicemen. The working group has developed an extensive body of knowledge on certain of these incidents. In its work the CWWG has also addressed the Russian side's requests for information on its servicemen missing from the conflict in Afghanistan and from incidents which occurred during the Cold War era.

As a result of the work conducted to date the CWWG has acquired more than 80 primary Soviet source documents which contain some 200 pages of information of the highest authority relating to the U.S. aircraft loss incidents. Scores of interviews with Soviet pilots who participated in the shootdowns as well as with other participants, witnesses and knowledgeable individuals, have been conducted. The combination of primary-source documentation and witness testimony related to the loss of a USAF RB-29 on 7 October 1952 led to the location, recovery and repatriation of the remains of Captain John Robertson Dunham, USAF.

The Commission has undertaken field trips across the former Soviet Union. The Commission conducted a field investigation of the 2 September 1958 loss of a C-130 near Yerevan in the then-Soviet Republic of Armenia. Commission representatives visited the crash site in August 1993, interviewed witnesses and coordinated a detailed investigation by forensic anthropologists from the U.S. Army. Field investigations continue.

Based on the synthesis of information obtained from U.S. and Russian archives and from interviews conducted with American and Russian veterans and others, the CWWG has developed a detailed account of the circumstances of loss in several cases. In other cases, the details are less clear. The CWWG cites, in this regard, three examples where further clarification is sought. In the 29 July 1953 loss of a U.S. RB-50, shot down by Soviet fighters near Vladivostok in the Soviet Far East, the co-pilot of the plane survived the crash and was subsequently rescued by the U.S. Navy. Circumstantial evidence has been obtained that additional crew members may have survived. In another case, information has been received that surviving crew members from a plane shot down on 4 July 1952 were interrogated in detail about a crew member missing from an RB-29 shot down by the Soviets near Vladivostok on 13 June 1952. In a third case, the CWWG has information that the remains of a U.S. crew member from a plane shot down in the Barents Sea on 1 July 1960, were recovered by the Soviets. To date, the location of these remains has not been ascertained. Work continues to clarify the details of these and other questions related to each of the Cold War loss incidents.

At this time the CWWG considers increased access to Russian archives of primary importance to furthering the goals of the Commission. The U.S. side has repeatedly pressed for access to Russian Border Guards archives in the belief that the Border Guards units would have played a role or, at least, been fully aware of the circumstances surrounding each of the incidents. The U.S. side has identified relevant documents in the Russian Central Naval archives and has asked the Russian side to provide them for review by the Commission. The request remains open. Work on each of the Cold War incidents continues.

VIETNAM WAR WORKING GROUP

The Vietnam War Working Group (VWWG) of the Commission has examined issues regarding the loss of U.S. servicemen in Southeast Asia. The Russian side has provided the U.S. side 270 pages of material in 76 documents, including 64 pages of previously classified information from Soviet military intelligence holdings on the air war in Vietnam. Interviews on events in Vietnam during the war years have been conducted with more than 100 witnesses. Many of these interviews have been with intelligence officers, senior military technicians, present and former high-ranking government officials. Efforts to discover additional documentation and to locate and interview additional witnesses continue.

As in other areas of the Commission's work, the Vietnam War Working Group believes it is essential to seek further information from Russian archives regarding the issue of American POW/MIAs from the Vietnam War. In its continuing examination of the issue, the VWWG believes that additional interviews with officers of the former Committee for State Security (KGB), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) of the General Staff are a high priority.

The issues before the VWWG have included the transfer of U.S. POWs to the Soviet Union; Soviet involvement with U.S. POWs in Southeast Asia, either through direct or indirect

contact; information from Soviet archives concerning Vietnamese policy toward U.S. POWs, and information known to Soviet veterans and other personnel concerning loss incidents involving U.S. personnel during the Vietnam War. In this context, one of the primary lines of inquiry guiding the work of the VWWG has been the question of whether American POWs were transported from Southeast Asia to the former Soviet Union. At this stage in its investigation, the working group has found no first-hand, substantiated evidence that American prisoners of war were taken from Southeast Asia to the former Soviet Union. However, the working group continues to investigate other information which suggests that such transfers may have taken place. The issue continues to be one of highest priority in the Commission's research and investigation.

The VWWG has reviewed two important documents from the Russian GRU (military intelligence). While not vouching for the accuracy of the documents' contents, the Russian Co-chairman of the Commission has stated that they are valid transcripts of wartime reports by North Vietnamese officials on the number of American POWs captured and held in North Vietnam during the war. In the first document, dated 1971, a North Vietnamese official stated that 735 American POWs were being held. In the second document, dated 1972, another North Vietnamese official state that 1205 American POWs were being held by the North Vietnamese. Both documents have been dismissed as fabrications by the Government of Vietnam.

The numbers 1205 and 735 are higher than the 591 U.S. servicemen who were returned in early 1973 during Operation Homecoming. There is debate within the U.S. side of the Commission as to whether the numbers cited in these reports are plausible.¹ The U.S. Government has concluded that there is probably more information in Vietnamese party and military archives that could shed light on these documents, and both the U.S. and Russian sides agree that ultimate clarification of these documents should come from the Government of the

¹ *A coordinated, interagency intelligence analysis released by the Department of Defense on 24 January 1994 casts doubt on the accuracy of the numbers in the Russian documents. Another analysis, by U.S. Senator Bob Smith released on 21 July 1993, lends credibility to the documents.*

Socialist Republic of Vietnam. However, in the interim, the VWWG is continuing to seek additional information from Russian sources to assist with its investigation into these documents, to include access to the Soviet-Vietnamese translators who initially acquired and evaluated these reports, as well as access to relevant archival reports.

The Vietnam War Working Group has also received important leads which may clarify the degree of Soviet involvement with interrogations of American POWs. The VWWG is continuing to seek archival access to determine whether interrogation records might exist in the archives of the Russian Ministry of Defense, the KGB and the GRU. The Commission is also continuing to seek interviews with Russian Vietnam War veterans and Russian personnel who may have relevant recollections. The U.S. side of the Commission has underscored to the Russian side the importance of determining whether any Vietnamese or Russian interrogation records might contain information on unaccounted for U.S. personnel. The efforts of the VWWG continue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In its work to date the Commission has made steady progress towards its objectives. In May 1995, an interim report on the work of the Commission was presented to the Presidents of the United States and Russia. This comprehensive report is designed to present to the President of the United States the Commission's findings to date and to inform the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State of the need for follow-up action by each of the Armed Services and other appropriate agencies of the federal government. We have managed to resolve certain of the issues which have been before us. However, we believe that a considerable amount of work remains to be done. We recommend that the United States Government reaffirm its commitment to building and sustaining a vigorous interview and archival search program in Russia and the other states of the former Soviet Union to pursue additional information on the fates of American POW/MIAs. This, coupled with a well-targeted use of the media for publicizing the Commission's program and objectives, has proven to be the only effective means for

achieving progress. For by keeping the issue of American POW/MIAs in the public eye, both in the U.S. and in Russia, we assure that those with information that might help resolve our unanswered questions are aware of the U.S. Government's efforts on behalf of our unaccounted-for servicemen.

United States-Russia Joint Commission on Prisoners of War/Missing in Action

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